

Fund. AT&T looks forward to demonstrating for the Commission and the model's critics the improved characteristics of the newest Hatfield version.

**II. THE COMMENTERS AGREE THAT THE COMMISSION SHOULD TAKE STEPS TO CONTROL THE OVERALL COSTS OF THE UNIVERSAL SERVICE SYSTEM.**

The commenters universally support the majority of the Joint Board's proposals regarding low-income support and subsidies for schools, libraries, and rural health care providers. Nonetheless, there is equally broad agreement that certain aspects of the Board's recommendations would unnecessarily increase the size of the USF and should not be adopted at this time.

**A. The Comments Reflect Broad Support For The Joint Board's Lifeline and Link-Up Proposals, But They Do Not Agree With The Recommendation That The Baseline Level of Support Should Be Increased to \$5.25.**

For example, there is broad support among the commenters for the Joint Board's proposals regarding the Lifeline and Link-Up programs. However, many commenters agree with AT&T that the Commission should not raise the federal baseline level of support to \$5.25 (with the possibility of further federal matching funds up to \$7.00) at this time.<sup>17</sup> The Commission should instead adopt only the Board's proposals for Lifeline funding for the cost of voluntary toll limitation and toll blocking services. The Commission should not adopt a rule prohibiting carriers that receive universal service support from disconnecting

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<sup>17</sup> See BellSouth at 18; SBC at 7-8; MCI at 13.

customers that fail to pay toll charges. Rather, the Commission should establish by rule a finite grace period after which carriers could disconnect such customers.

**B. The Commenters Agree That The Commission Should Take Steps To Control The Size Of Subsidies To Schools, Libraries, And Rural Health Care Providers.**

With respect to subsidies for schools and libraries, the vast majority of commenters, along with AT&T, support the Joint Board's recommendation that telecommunications carriers should provide discounts to schools and libraries for telecommunications services. By the same token, however, there is widespread agreement that the Commission should not allow the use of funds from the USF, which is funded solely by telecommunications carriers, to subsidize services other than regulated telecommunications services, such as inside wiring and enhanced services (including Internet access).<sup>18</sup> As these commenters show, such expanded subsidies would raise serious questions about the Commission's authority under the statute.

The commenters similarly agree that the Commission should place reasonable limits on subsidies for rural health care providers. For example, many commenters note that subsidies supporting access to capacity of 1.54 Mbps would be fully sufficient to meet the needs of rural health care providers, and some note that even 1.54 Mbps is more than many need.<sup>19</sup> Consistent with these commenters' observations, AT&T has recommended a two-tiered set of subsidized services, depending on the type of facility. See AT&T at 23-24.

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., GTE at 89-97; BellSouth at 19-29; Ameritech at 18-19; Pacific at 37-41, 44-47; USTA at 34-35; Bell Atlantic at 21; NYNEX at 40; SBC at 43-47.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., USTA at 39; Ameritech at 24-25; U S WEST at 51-52; see Pacific at 55.

The commenters also uniformly oppose using the USF to fund upgrades to network infrastructure.<sup>20</sup>

**III. ALL THE COMMENTS AGREE THAT THE COMMISSION SHOULD ESTABLISH A NEUTRAL ADMINISTRATOR TO OVERSEE THE UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUND.**

Finally, AT&T (at 26-27) has urged the Commission to adopt the Joint Board's recommendation "that the Commission appoint a universal service advisory board to designate a neutral, third-party administrator" for the Universal Service Fund. RD at ¶ 829. This position is unanimously echoed by every other commenter addressing this issue.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the Board correctly concluded that NECA as currently constituted should not be appointed to administer the USF. RD at ¶ 832. Under the new universal service system required by the Act -- in which all telecommunications carriers contribute to the USF and potentially receive subsidies from the USF within a competitive environment -- it is vitally important that the administrator of the USF be completely neutral. A number of good alternatives to NECA, such as Bellcore (now divested from the BOCs) or a private accounting or other firm that specializes in the management of complex compensation systems (like Lockheed Martin IMS) exist. If the Commission does not choose one of these firms as the administrator, the commenters uniformly agree that a complete restructuring of NECA would be essential to render it an appropriate administrator.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., USTA at 40-41; Pacific at 58-60; California at 8-9.

<sup>21</sup> See, e.g., Pacific at 60; NYNEX at 41; Sprint at 11.


<sup>22</sup> See Pacific at 60; NYNEX at 42.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Commission should adopt the Joint Board's recommendations for implementation of the universal service provisions of the Act, with those modifications endorsed above and in AT&T's Comments.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Thomas Blaser, do hereby certify that a true copy of the foregoing Reply Comments of AT&T Corp. was served this 10th day of January, 1997, by United States mail, first class, postage prepaid, upon the parties listed on the attached Service List.

  
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